



CRISIS COMMUNICATION: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A CRISIS OR ACTIVE SHOOTER EVENT

**A Guidebook for Public Relations Executives
In the Council of the Great City Schools**

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INTRODUCTION

If Public Relations Executives (PREs) in urban school districts learned anything during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that our capacity to adapt and innovate expands even more during a crisis. We also learned that it has never been more important for PREs and their teams to proactively prepare for life-threatening challenges. Such incidents include a pandemic, a bomb/explosion, an environmental disaster, life-threatening violence against a student or staff member, or a school shooting.

These possibilities, combined with a rise in mental health issues and greater availability of weapons, make it imperative for PREs to prepare for the unthinkable.

We know that when a crisis occurs, communication will begin without us.

Chaos and anxiety will be immediate. Students will seek physical and emotional support; families will demand information; loved ones and media will rush to the scene; data and details will be collected and shared in cultural silos; and social media will instantly become a primary source of news.

Our challenge and responsibility in a crisis event is to:

- 1. Remain calm, exhibit confidence, demonstrate readiness to keep our students and staff safe, and keep families and the community informed;**
- 2. Communicate quickly and professionally on multiple platforms and through interactive communication channels with messaging that is honest, timely, and compassionate; and**
- 3. Be at our best as professionals in managing the news media and in providing all stakeholders with the information they need.**

This guidebook was created to help PREs proactively plan for, and be ready to manage, communications during any crisis that raises extreme anxiety over school safety, that threatens the lives of children and staff, and halts routine school operations. The document also includes specific communication examples from school districts that have experienced other types of crisis such as cyberattacks.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE A CRISIS

CRISIS PREPARATION IN OUR CITIES AND SCHOOLS

Districts that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) already have active emergency plans in place through their city governments. These plans prepare first responders and related agencies to react immediately and effectively to disasters. This includes responding to school shootings and other events that risk public safety on our campuses, at businesses, and in neighborhoods. In addition to emergency response strategies, school districts are required to develop plans that meet state and federal guidelines for school safety management.

Existing emergency management systems follow guidelines and directives from the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other emergency, rescue, and law enforcement agencies. City safety personnel, along with state and local agencies, train and prepare staff to prevent and mitigate bomb threats, terrorist acts, natural disasters, and other dangers. They are equipped to assist citizens and organizations, including schools, with preventing violence and help communities recover from a crisis or tragedy.

For Example:

- State legislatures require public and private schools to adopt safety plans.
- City charters describe the responsibilities and powers delegated to the mayor and department directors during a shooting or other crisis events.
- National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) direct departments, agencies, and political subdivisions within states to utilize the system for incident management.
- Mayors direct the city's elected officials, departments, agencies, and offices on the use of these standard response systems.
- The federal Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, passed in 2006, requires government entities to facilitate the reunification of minors with their parents/guardians in crisis situations.
- Following the 2012 Sandy Hook shootings, in Newtown, Connecticut, the FBI set a national standard for active shooter training that has better aligned federal, state, and local agencies.

Our city school districts have their own comprehensive plans and procedures for responding to bomb threats and other critical incidents in schools. Due to a rise in school shootings, their plans increasingly focus on preparing for active shooter events as well.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE A CRISIS

Crisis communication cannot be effectively managed without knowing the crisis procedures already in place. PREs and their communications teams should collaborate with their district safety and security teams to observe and become familiar with crisis [training for active shooter events](#), evacuation procedures, and other efforts coordinated with emergency response agencies.

THE VARIOUS ROLES OF THE CITY'S FIRST RESPONDERS

The safety plans managed by city public safety departments and emergency management offices include databases to identify facilities, rescue/evacuation plans and routes, and family reunification procedures with pre-determined sites.

The city's department of public works typically maintains a list of school facilities, coordinates that list with the office of emergency management, and manages evacuation sites and reunification centers.

School-based safety and security officers work closely with the office of emergency management, city police, FBI and first responders to understand complementary roles in mitigating and responding to school shootings and other crisis events.

Once you and your teams are familiar with those strategies, you can better align your work with theirs.

City public health departments and county health boards are trained to coordinate volunteer healthcare providers (e.g., nurses, physicians, pharmacists). School districts' Medical Reserve Corps (MRCs) are trained to staff evacuation and reunification centers to:

- Verify credentials, and;
- Coordinate staff and resources.

The American Red Cross also maintains a volunteer corps to assist with staffing and to support students and families in reunification centers.

The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security respond to investigate incidents and mitigate further threats.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE A CRISIS

THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT'S CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

School district safety and security teams are expected to implement established protocols when responding to an active shooter or other crisis event. They prepare in advance by using active shooting drills to train principals, teachers, and students. They provide pocket guides and classroom emergency response signage, instructional pamphlets, and flips charts, etc. They also engage on a regular basis in joint response planning with city and county agencies.

THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT'S CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

In the event of a disaster or crisis, the school district's CEO/Superintendent will lead crisis management in executing plans to continue operations. This not only includes the safe and orderly evacuation of students but the transporting, housing, and feeding of students during times when normal school operations cease and a crisis unfolds.

During the pandemic, school districts managed crisis situations that closed facilities for extended periods and preserved academic functions, contracted with service providers, provided childcare, distributed course materials and technology, set up meal sites, and provided other services.

In an active shooter situation or other crisis, the district's top senior leaders should be prepared to:

- Use the student information database to:
 - Facilitate emergency medical response and treatment of victims;
 - Contact parents of students injured or deceased;
 - Support the reunification of families with students at the reunification center;
- Communicate with families, the community and media;
- Assign transportation, food service, nursing, psychological support, language services, disability accommodations, social and emotional learning supports, and other essential services;
- Help external agencies unify and support families, which could include:

- Transporting students/staff to staging areas;
- Checking attendance, releasing students, and streamlining the reunification process;
- Controlling lines of sight for orderly flow with signage, stanchions, and staffing;
- Notifying and communicating with parents as students are released/picked up; or
- Completing reunification cards and other recommended documentation.

THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT'S CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

As the systems for crisis response and management are deployed, PREs must:

- Quickly focus on gathering information from first responders and crisis managers;
- Coordinate messaging through a Joint Information Center (JIC); and
- Equip superintendents with information to communicate first and quickly to the school board and community.

Coordinating communication with other Public Information Officer (PIOs) in city/county agencies in advance of a crisis is one of the most important steps PREs can take. Planning with PIOs ensures that messaging is timely and accurate, and that school district communication is not lost in the shuffle when PIOs from numerous agencies operate and communicate in silos.

A Joint Information Center (JIC) is a designated facility, typically activated by a city or county, to coordinate public information and crisis communication during emergencies on a mass scale. The JIC serves as a central location for first responders to transmit information and for PIOs to draft and release information to media and the public. Because activating a JIC is standard protocol during times of crisis (flood, explosions, etc.) it is recommended that PREs become familiar with their city's emergency management protocols and position themselves for inclusion as a central figure in any JIC activated during a school shooting incident or other mass emergency affecting schools. This will not only ensure the PRE has the most accurate and timely information as it is transmitted by first responders, but will also position the school district to be first in communicating critical information to staff and families.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE A CRISIS



CLARIFYING ROLES & COORDINATING MESSAGING

Before a crisis occurs, it is important that everyone knows what roles they will play. This is why pre-planning for these events is crucial. Here are some things PRE's should do in advance:

1. Regularly meet with your school district's safety and security team to:
 - Observe staff training(s).
 - Accompany them at meetings with city/county agencies that plan emergency responses to crisis and active shooter events.
2. Identify and invite the PIOs of agencies in those trainings to plan and prepare for where and how the city's JIC will operate during a disaster, or how they will coordinate during an active shooter crisis.
3. Get to know your city's emergency response PIO's before there is an incident and within the first three or four weeks of any staff transition. Meet quarterly for coffee or lunch to build rapport. Confirm you have each other's contact information, especially cell phone numbers, so you can quickly connect in a crisis.
4. Establish how information and updates will flow between agencies, and within respective organizations, during the crisis.
 - Confirm which responding agencies will provide continuous updates to the JIC.
 - Clarify how information will flow from the crisis site to the JIC.
 - Plan how the PRE and agency PIOs will collaborate together to draft and finalize talking points.
 - Identify spokespersons in the district and city/county agencies who will deliver information, through which means, and in what order.
 - The CEO/ Superintendent should be at the forefront of crisis communications, where feasible, in partnership with law enforcement or government officials, such as the mayor, during and throughout a crisis such as an active shooter event.

CRITICAL KEYS TO CRISIS PREPARATION

Drafting and Activating Holding Statements

PREs should draft holding statements for use immediately upon receiving word of a crisis event.

Holding statements can be developed now and used as a template later when a situation occurs and facts are known.

Appendix A of this guidebook includes a sample holding statement and draft news release to use in preparing for an active shooter incident. Using these samples, or creating similar drafts, will enable you to gather and prioritize information as it is available and approved for release by the JIC.

It is also vitally important that school districts update parent/guardian contact information in proactive ways -- similar to methods used by physicians' offices to routinely verify addresses and phone numbers.

Questions to Ask in Your District Before a Crisis Occurs:

Preparation:

- Do you understand how your team will deploy when a crisis occurs?
- What happens when a team member is pulled out of the mix (vacation, having surgery, family issue, etc.)?
- Does your team include representatives from community agencies?
- Have you practiced with your team to find out who can think clearly under pressure and accomplish the work assigned to them (are there too many or not the right tasks)?
- Do key stakeholders know their role (as a board member, superintendent, central office leader)?
- How will you keep district leaders informed about real/potential crisis situations to avoid surprises?

Speed vs. Accuracy:

- Does your district operate with one voice?
- Are you prepared to respond to messages from other parties whose comments you can't control?
- Have you discussed the impact of social media on communication, specifically the impact on speed of messaging in order to remain a trusted voice with key stakeholders?
- Who is talking to Board of Education members and who is talking to first responders?

Your Toolbox:

- Do you know who will contact you, and how, to provide information when a crisis occurs?
- Have you identified all key stakeholders who need information in a crisis, and who is responsible for reaching out to them? How will you reach them? When will you reach out to them?
- Do you have communication plans when you are out of the office or after hours?
- Have you developed plans to communicate with parents that don't speak English fluently?
- Have you prepared messages in advance?

DURING A CRISIS



PUTTING THE SUPERINTENDENT IN FRONT OF THE MESSAGING

This step deserves more than a mention in a crisis communications guidebook. In an ideal situation PREs should provide the district CEO/Superintendent with the most accurate information within the first 10-15 minutes of an emergency event or school shooting event (refer to the timeline on page 11). However, in many cases this may not be possible due to the chaotic nature of such events. But even if the superintendent is not able to have all the facts, they still need to appear with law enforcement and other first responders. Although superintendents will most likely be flanked by the chief of police and heads of other agencies at a news conference, families need to see their school superintendent front and center in a school crisis.

Families need more than updates on casualties and the status of the city's emergency response. Families need to hear messages of compassion, hope, and support. They also need guidance on where to go to reunify with their children and get the help they need. This is essential before handing off the microphone to a mayor, sheriff, police chief, or a medical worker for crisis/situation-specific updates.

KEEPING SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS INFORMED

Keeping school board members informed is essential to your response, as is making sure they are updated simultaneously. Your superintendent likely communicates with trustees through a group text and/or a group e-mail (and should be clear that no one can "reply all" without violating open meeting laws). The superintendent will want to let them know when the next update or news conference is coming and/or share a general timeline for when information will be shared. For example, "We'll update the public at tomorrow's 9 a.m. news conference" or "we'll update as soon as the police chief reports back."

Board members will receive immediate calls and text messages from concerned constituents, members of the media, and others. Providing school board members with identical talking points will ensure they respond word for word, with the same message as the district.

The board president should stand next to the superintendent at press conferences to show support and solidarity with the district's response. Ideally, though, the district speaks with one voice—that of the superintendent. The school board at some point may want to make a statement, however it is not in the first 48 hours in most cases and the school PRE should assist the school board in drafting language to make sure of its accuracy.

In a world driven by social media, communication is instant. Our colleagues who have experienced crisis events know this firsthand and have taught us that when such a crisis begins, we can expect that:

- PREs will receive text messages from chiefs and security teams that an active shooting or other event may be underway.
- Students and staff who hear shots or experience the crisis will call 911.
- Children will text their parents to ask for help or express their fear.
- Messages will be shared electronically, posted on social media, and picked up by news organizations (who will then call you to confirm what they are hearing).
- Parents will call their child's school and the superintendent's office, jamming phone lines across the district.
- Parents, news media, and community members will immediately race to the school.

The pre-planning outlined at the beginning of this guidebook prepares PREs for how information will flow and how key decisions will be made. It also outlines the information that should be shared as soon as the crisis response, management, and crisis communications teams activate individual and collective procedures.

Knowing how information will flow into the JIC, PREs can avoid the mistakes of first responders and school officials slow to communicate or contradict and correct each other's statements when they do. The school community and media will demand information and regular communication from school officials. Trust and credibility should be established in the first 30 minutes of the crisis with regular communication intervals even if new information or more



TIMELINE FOR CRISIS UPDATES

Experienced crisis communications professionals suggest a standard timeline known as the “15-30-60-90 Rule”. But when it comes to communicating with families, waiting 15 minutes for any information will feel like an eternity. It makes sense, therefore, for PREs to plan more aggressively, with a plan that gets something out within 5-10 minutes. If possible, update families every 10-15 minutes, as information critical to the emergency response, status of the rescue, and evacuation/reunification is known.

Using social media to communicate with families on snow days or calamity days shows how it has replaced the tradition of communicating through television or radio. School district information shared on our website and social media platforms is quickly shared with parents and the community. Communication is two-way. Families and students comment on our posts in real time, and local media check our sites for the most current, accurate, and reliable information about our schools. That is why PREs should plan and prepare to communicate first, and quickly, to establish the school district as the most timely and reliable source of information.

THE FIRST 5-10 MINUTES



Within the first 5-10 minutes, districts should release their first communication directly to internal and external stakeholders, starting with those most affected: students, staff, and families. That message should immediately be followed by a statement to media. This can be a simple acknowledgement of the situation before details are known. In addition, you can use the holding statements in Appendix A to, 1) provide reassurance that an emergency response has been activated, 2) instruct what staff and families should be doing, and 3) inform where and when updates will be posted as soon as information is received and verified.

THE FIRST 15-20 MINUTES



Within 15-20 minutes, first responders, in communication with the JIC, are likely to have confirmed the first details that can be shared on the school district's website and social media pages. News media will benefit (and appreciate) being given, or directed to, information about the school affected, its demographics, etc., and an estimated time for the first news conference.

THE FIRST 30-45 MINUTES



Your superintendent should be readied for his/her first public appearance. Families and the community will look to the school district for the most current and reliable information. This appearance should be live-streamed, if possible, and recorded so it can be posted immediately on the district's website and social media platforms. This message must include details as they are known, as well as empathetic affirmations already drafted into the holding statement.

THE FIRST 60 MINUTES



Additional press conferences should follow. In addition to the superintendent, they may include other key leaders as appropriate (e.g., mayor, sheriff, chief of police). Participants should be representatives with whom the school district and city's security detail have worked to secure the school, apprehend the suspect, evacuate the students, treat the injured, support the families, etc. Working in cooperation with other PIOs in the JIC, PREs should help create talking points for their respective spokespersons and plan the order for each representative to provide details from their perspective and area of knowledge and expertise.

THE CRITICAL FIRST 10 MINUTES

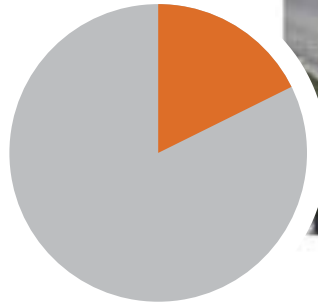
GATHERING INFORMATION

- News media and others will pick up information in “real time” on police scanners (which may or may not be accurate).
- Without access to the scene, news anchors or reporters will convey information observed from their helicopter’s aerial view and from students, staff, and others calling newsrooms.
- PREs, in cooperation with other PIOs in the JIC, should have access to scanners and to reliable contacts at the crisis site to verify information as its transmitted.
- As facts are relayed and verified, talking points, prepared in the JIC, will ensure consistent messaging for all PIOs.
- Advanced planning for when and how the superintendent and other agency heads will share information will ensure the school district is communicating first, or simultaneously, with heads of other agencies.
- Referring news media to identified PIOs/ spokespersons ensures that information and talking points are consistent with the first message delivered by the superintendent.

DRAFTING THE FIRST MESSAGE

The school district’s initial statement should:

- Express compassion for staff, students, and families affected.
- Summarize what is know (so far) about the incident.
- Instruct families where to reunite with students (provide a map if possible) and how to navigate the reunification process.
- Announce where continuous updates will be posted and when to expect the next news conference/ update as police respond.
- Make sure a Spanish-language communication specialist/interpreter is part of the Communications team to quickly make messaging available in Spanish. Messages should also be distributed in a district’s top three languages.



COMMUNICATING TO DISTRICT STAFF

For a crisis at a specific school, the district should communicate to staff at that school through phone/text/ email or mass notification systems such as Finals site, Parentlink, etc. Depending on the situation, a principal might use the intercom system within their building. The intercom is an important tool to remember, as sometimes teachers don’t have their phone with them, or their email pulled up. Something as simple as “staff, please review your outlook email immediately for an important information update.”

Here are several actions districts can take during a crisis to communicate to staff in other buildings:

- The district’s security dispatch center should have a distribution email list to which they send each 911 call that is made to a school. This is often the first trigger PREs use to begin developing strategic messages for a building.
- Districts should have a cross-functional district crisis team in which crisis team members know their responsibility.
- Use the district’s messaging system (email, phone, text) to communicate to all district staff to make sure they’re aware and have at least a few key talking points.

MANAGING NEWS MEDIA

There was a time when PREs could easily distinguish between social media and traditional media. In the digital age, however, newspaper, TV, and radio reporters are posting news stories and updates on their digital platforms just as quickly as citizen journalists are posting on an increasing number of instant messaging and social media platforms.

PRIORITIZE MESSAGES

- Practice with staff beforehand who will serve in specific roles during a crisis.
- Attend to your own information gathering first.
- Focus first on messaging to your staff and families, while assigning members of the team or an outside consultant to manage and prioritize media requests in the order they come in, sending a statement and updates to your media list.
- Reduce the number of one-off requests and ensure media members are receiving the same information at the same time.
- Monitor, 24/7, what's being posted on local and national media platforms, in print publications, and on social media sites about the incident.
- Remember, students are sharing information in real time, some of which may not be accurate. You may wish to emphasize that the only dependable, accurate source of information will come from the school district and law enforcement.
- Provide timely and accurate updates, and correct misinformation as it arises.
- In addition to providing communications support for the impacted school(s), share information, and talking points with other school leaders to share with staff and families.

FINALIZE HOLDING STATEMENTS

- All holding statements, including the initial statement issued within the first 10 minutes before information is known, should include contact information, phone numbers, and email addresses for media questions.
- Include links to a district crisis communications website where all statements, messaging, and updates are posted.

GATHER SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

- While waiting for updates, PREs and their teams can gather demographic data for the school affected, including the grades and number of students enrolled, number of staff employed, which classes are housed in the impacted wing of the building, etc. You will be asked for this information.
- Create an FAQ page on the website and add these fast facts for those seeking additional information.
- If your district has a family engagement hotline, ensure those in charge have information and talking points so that they can respond to questions from families who call in.

MANAGING NEWS MEDIA

TRIAGE CALLS

- Prep your communications team and add additional staff to monitor email, answer phones, record on-hold messaging, and quickly respond to callers.
- If there is a need to evacuate a school, ensure that one of the PREs is at the reunification site to assist and respond to questions from families and news media or direct reporters to the appropriate spokesperson.
- Email these staff members the prepared statements and instructions on where to access the most timely, accurate, updated information as it is received.
- Add updated information to your “on hold” messaging in key offices.
- Post an alert banner on your website directing information seekers to a designated page with the latest statement, information updates, superintendent messages/videos, news releases, the time of the next press conference, etc.
- Do **NOT** post a message apologizing that you are unavailable or overwhelmed with calls.

RESPECT LOCAL MEDIA

It's important to remember that local reporters cover your school district every day. PREs should not give more weight or more attention to calls from “big names” in cable news and from producers of shows hosted by nationally-recognized media personalities. They are, too often, put at the front of the line.



MANAGING NEWS MEDIA

PREs SHOULD:

- **Take care of local reporters first.** That is a basic rule in building good media relations. Local reporters will be on the story longer than the outsiders, and they will remember how you attended to their needs and referred national media outlets to them and to their local affiliates for the information, documents, and interviews you provide.
- Be as open and honest as possible from the start of a crisis and you will be better positioned to assure reporters you will continue to support their work as the “why” becomes clearer in the aftermath of the crisis.
- Keep communicating, even when the information has not changed. “Here’s what we have (repeat what’s already been told). We have nothing to add at this time, but we expect an update shortly.”

PRESS CONFERENCES

With news assignment desks monitoring police scanners, PREs should expect media outlets to call the district and to deploy cameras, reporters, and live trucks to the area within minutes. In drafting your holding statements for the media, it’s important to estimate that your first news conference will be held within the first 30-60 minutes.

It is here that you can take advantage of any positive relationships you’ve developed with reporters, news directors, and assignment editors. Expect news outlets to reach the school or as close to it as possible within 10-15 minutes of an incident.

- Announce the time and location of the press conference **as soon as possible.**
- Designate a spokesperson, ideally your superintendent. However, if the crisis is still unfolding at the school, the communications director should be the spokesperson.
- Brief speakers on information being reported and posted on social media.
- Equip spokespersons with talking points drafted and approved in cooperation with the JIC and post them on social media.

- Determine when and where press conferences are held, and when/what information is released.
- Communicate the gravity of the event and emphasize sensitivity to victims and their families.
- Clarify errors of fact or rumors that persist on social media.
- Announce where information is posted and updated and when the next press briefing will occur.
- Show sympathy toward victims and their families.
- Include signers and translators to ensure messages are clear to all stakeholders.

Depending on the demographics of the district, PREs may wish to provide Spanish language interpretation in written updates and at news conferences. Ideally the superintendent, if fluent, may be asked to share all or part of the news in Spanish. If that is not possible, a district administrator or spokesperson may be called up to address the Spanish speaking audience, both at the news conference or during interviews with Spanish language media.

If not provided by city government, the school district could provide live ASL (American Sign Language) interpretation at the news conferences.

CRISIS RECOVERY

Acts of mass violence will cause extreme disruption. Caring for the mental health of the community is critical for promoting resilience and recovery. Crisis experts advise that every school community has its own culture. Communications professionals can contribute what is known about that culture to support crisis recovery.

Expect community gatherings, memorial services, and candlelight vigils in the aftermath of a shooting event. Counselors attest that while these measures are comforting in the moment, what is really helpful is assisting students and families move forward and return to familiar routines as quickly as possible.

The balancing act PREs face is to help people recover and move on *without keeping their traumatic experience at the forefront*. For this reason, the most effective intervention supports in the wake of a crisis are local strategies implemented in cooperation with local service providers, counselors, and agencies that already have relationships with the grieving school community.

National crisis experts can also be helpful. They can provide training and consultation to local providers and extend programs and additional interventions families may need in their immediate, intermediate, and long-term recovery. Those interventions often promote the principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) and include: safety calming, self- and community-efficacy, social connectedness, and restoring a sense of hope/optimism. These principles should be foremost in the messaging of PREs during the school community's recovery.



"It felt like the CVPA way today, the way we do business. It was a productive day. I feel like everyone was in good spirits. We had smooth transitions. At this point I'm focusing on the mental health of the students and staff. It was good having counselors available. We had some good connections made with the therapists who were here. I feel really good about the support we have received."

--Dr. Kacy Shahid, Principal of Central Visual and Performing Arts High School in St. Louis, after the reopening of school following an incident where a student and teacher were killed.

ACTIVATION TIMELINE

Incident Occurs



**Family Reunification Center
Within 2-7 hours**



**Family Assistance Center
Within 48-72 hours**



**Resiliency Center
~3+ weeks**

CONCLUSION

We know from experience and from observing poorly managed crisis response and communication that our primary goal is to eliminate, or at least minimize, complications that result when panic and confusion reign.

For example, first responders warn that for every child in a school, as many as 10 people will be inclined to drive directly to the campus. This will confound rescue efforts. Emergency workers should not have to abandon their vehicles and rush long distance on foot, carrying stretchers and medical gear. Police are key to traffic flow. PREs are in the best position to convey to families how they can best support the rescue effort.

The time to anticipate such complications is now. A proactive communications plan will include holding statements, sample messages, and other tools recommended in this guidebook. With this plan in place when a crisis occurs, PREs and senior leaders can focus on 1) securing students and staff, 2) keeping the entire school community informed of progress, and 3) leading an effective emergency response.

What we also know from experience is that we are not alone when the unthinkable happens.

- Our city and county agencies are trained and ready to support us before, during, and after a crisis event or school shooting.
- Our CEO/Superintendents, our safety and security teams, senior leaders, and the PREs in the CGCS network have, at our fingertips, the supports needed to guide teams through a crisis.

Proper planning ensures that crisis communication is:

- **Immediate**, to calm fears, provide direction, quell rumors, and redirect anxiety toward reunification and recovery.
- **Informative**, not only for communicating the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the event, but to guide a panicked community toward rational and reasonable actions that aid, rather than hinder, response.
- **Honest**, in ways that give no hint of understatement, obfuscation, omission of facts, or “spinning” a negative situation into a positive one. People just want and need the truth.
- **Compassionate**, to let people know their personal feelings matter as much as, or more than, the desire of the entire school community to know what’s happening.
- **Interactive**, in ways that:
 1. Acknowledge the opportunity in the digital age to provide information and answer questions through multimedia platforms.
 2. Quell rumors when they start.
 3. Answer questions as they are raised.
 4. Engage the community and the media, as much as possible.

Truth and compassionate concern for others is the bottom line in Crisis Communication.



These surveillance images of a 2008 shooting event show how quickly a school can turn from normal to nightmare, and are used in active shooter training in Cleveland to stress the importance of readiness and thoughtful planning for such events.

In conveying the importance of pre-planning for an active shooter event, the safety and security team in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District uses school surveillance video to remind staff how quickly things can move from normal to nightmare in a school.

These sobering images underscore the importance of readiness and the need for crisis communicators to engage regularly in thoughtful planning.

By working with crisis responders and managers, we are better able to ensure that none of our efforts complicate what may be a chaotic, anxiety-filled situation.

PREs are best prepared to communicate effectively in a crisis event by:

- Knowing the plans and actions of first responders.
- Preparing in advance for the flow of information from the site to PIOs of related agencies.
- Developing a communication plan that considers the proactive measures outlined in this guidebook and/or in the additional resources provided in the Appendices.
- Ensuring your communication, reunification, and recovery efforts:
 - » Demonstrate confidence and control;
 - » Show responsibility with effective strategies for diffusing fear and anxiety; and
 - » Reflect an empathetic, compassionate response to families' need to reach their children when they are in danger.

PREs must demonstrate preparedness, responsibility, and concern for those impacted and be ready to keep the public and the media informed. By doing this, PREs can meet fear, anger, and anxiety with the calm, thoughtful and compassionate response needed in every crisis situation.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE

HOLDING STATEMENT

UPDATED: _____

Police have responded to a report of (a possible/unconfirmed) active shooter at _____ school. The school is in lockdown, and our crisis response plan has been activated. School staff and security officers are working to keep students isolated and safe. Families and media are asked to stay away from the school and from roads leading to the school to avoid blocking access for police and emergency workers responding.

At this point, let's place our faith and trust in the quick-acting police and rescue workers who are at the scene, as we await confirmation that the threat has been eliminated and our school can be safely evacuated.

In the meantime, we will keep you fully informed by posting and updating information on the district website and social media platforms as we receive it.

Here's what we know at this point:

- the alleged shooter is [in custody / is isolated/ has been disarmed / has been injured/killed
- #___ students are reported to have been treated at the scene/transported for examination/treatment.
- Families of victims have been/are being notified.
- Evacuation of the school is underway / will begin shortly
- Unless personally directed otherwise, parents and caregivers should report, with identification, to the reunification center at _____.
- As we gather more information, our thoughts are with the students, families and staff affected by this tragic turn of events at _____ school.
- Our next news conference and update will be at _____ a.m./p.m.
- We continue to gather information as it is available, and will continue to keep families and the community fully updated on our website, social media platforms and through our school messaging service.

SAMPLE

TEXT MESSAGE / ROBO CALL

“This is (NAME), superintendent of (School District), with an urgent message for families of students who attend ____ School.

SCHOOL NAME has been placed on lockdown while police respond to reports of an active shooting incident in or around our school. Our emergency response plan has been activated in (____ school/all schools) to keep staff and students isolated and secure. Police are working to keep all roads leading to _____ school clear, to enable police and emergency workers to respond quickly.

Families of students and staff can help by reinforcing this guidance, keeping the areas around ____ school clear, keeping phone lines open, and following instructions as we receive and share them with you.

Our goal right now is to ensure our students and staff are safe, the threat is eliminated, and our families are fully informed.

I will be joining [emergency response officials if known] in a news conference at ____ o'clock to provide the most accurate and complete information as it is available. I will continue to keep you updated today through similar messages and website alerts. Thank you.

Drafting holding statements with as many points as are likely to be known in the first 10 minutes, will enable you to:

- quickly establish direct points of communication and information
- demonstrate preparedness and calm, deliberate action
- provide critical information to enable first responders to secure the scene and keep access roads and entrances clear for rescue and evacuation
- release information on casualties, and on notification of families affected
- direct all other families to reunification centers (and add a map if possible)
- allay fears and communicate empathy

SAMPLE

NEWS RELEASE

The _____ School District's Emergency Response Plan has been activated, as police respond to reports of a possible active shooting situation at _____ school. We have locked down the school to enable school officials and staff to keep students isolated and protected while the report is investigated and the threat addressed.

[The District] has activated our emergency communication protocols to alert families of the police response underway, and the need for families to stay away from the school and nearby streets to enable police and emergency workers to access and respond quickly to the site.

We are in communication with staff and families through our routine email/text/voice recorded message system, social media accounts and a website designated for crisis communication updates at _____.

The superintendent/CEO is monitoring updates from emergency management officials and will brief the community in a news conference at _____, scheduled at or about ____ o'clock.

Add (if known):

- the alleged shooter is [in custody / is isolated/ has been disarmed / has been injured/killed].
- #____ students are reported to have been treated at the scene/transported for examination/treatment.
- Families of victims have been/are being notified.
- Evacuation of the school is underway / will begin shortly
- Unless personally directed otherwise, parents and caregivers should report, with identification, to the reunification site at _____.
- As we gather more information, our thoughts are with the students, families and staff affected by this tragic turn of events at _____ school.
- Our next news conference and update will be at ____ o'clock.
- We continue to gather information as it is available, and will continue to keep families and the community fully updated on our website, social media platforms and through our school messaging service.

SAMPLE

INFORMATION UPDATE

[District] CEO/Superintendent [Name] will continue to brief the [District] community as more information is known about a school shooting incident at _____ school at _____ o'clock today.

We are grateful for the swift response of ~[police/rescue] who arrived at our school within _____ minutes of being notified of an active shooter in/around our school.

At this time, we have confirmed that

Select from any that apply:

- Evacuation protocols are in place and students are being transported to _____, the location designated as the family reunification site, at [address].
- Unless contacted directly by school personnel or other agency to do otherwise, parents should report, with identification, to (reunification location).
- #___ students are reported to have been treated at the scene/transported to hospitals. Those parents have been notified.
- The alleged shooter [is in custody/ has been isolated/disarmed/injured/killed].
- An evacuation of the school is in process/will begin shortly.
- Information and instructions will be continuously updated on our school district website, social media platforms and through our school messaging service.
- We continue to gather information as it is available, and will continue to keep families and the community fully updated.
- We expect to provide another update at _____ o'clock.
- All of us are grieving [with the families of students injured/killed], and we will be working together, in the difficult days ahead, to support our students, staff and families through this crisis.

APPENDIX B

This quick resource guide was created by the Wichita Public Schools' Strategic Communications team to highlight the critical action items that come into play for every crisis no matter the type or scope. With a full crisis communications plan behind this document, this QRG is on a clipboard at every staff member's work station so it can be easily accessed whenever the plan needs to be enacted.



CRISIS COMMUNICATION INCIDENT GUIDE REV 5/23
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

INCIDENT/DATE _____

CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN OUTLINE

- STEP 1: Verify Crisis Situation, Assignments, Team Members ("At A Glance")**
- STEP 2: Management and Logistics Considerations**
- STEP 3: Develop Key Messages**
- STEP 4: Approve and Release Key Messages**
- STEP 5: Monitor and Provide Feedback**
- STEP 6: Conduct Communications Debrief and Analysis After the Crisis**

**STRAT COMM
OPERATIONS BASE**
(if not in the office)

DEBRIEF NOTES - WHAT WENT RIGHT, WORKED WELL, DIDN'T WORK

ESSENTIAL DEFINITIONS:

LOCKOUT – Lock exterior doors, limit access from outside. Activity inside continues as normal.

LOCKDOWN – Lock internal and exterior doors, no one enters or leaves building. Access to classrooms and hallways also secured. Activities *may* continue in classrooms, but no one enters/leaves internal spaces.



ASSIGNMENTS/TEAM MEMBERS “At A Glance”

AUDIENCE / CHANNEL	RESPONSIBILITY
Weather Team / Crisis Team	Primary: Wendy Back-up: Susan A, Maria K <i>Spanish</i>
Key Staff <i>In the absence of both Wendy and Susan A, Suzy will be responsible for overseeing execution of action steps in the office.</i>	Primary: Wendy Back-up: Susan A Early morning: Ashley <i>Cable</i> (Jennifer as back-up), Maria K <i>Spanish</i> (Brenda Torres and Fabian Armendariz as back-ups)
Frontline Communicators <i>ZALLFrontlineComm, add ZALLPrincipals, ZALLClerical if necessary</i>	Primary: Suzy, Alicia
BOE / Email, Text, Phone <i>Staff will engage BOE at request of Supt., who may choose to handle those communications directly</i>	Primary: Wendy Back-up: Susan A, Suzy
ZALL Email	Primary: Wendy Back-up: Susan A, Suzy
Social Media / Students, Parents, Staff	Primary: Susan A (early AM, late night), Maria L / Maria K (daytime) Back-up: Susan A, Maria L and Maria K will back up each other, Brenda Torres is back up for Spanish
ParentLink / Parents, Staff (*Students) <i>See appendix for info on what groups for what message types</i> <i>NOTE: Support provided to principals if notification is localized</i>	Primary: Wendy (*Student notification is situational) Back-up: Susan A Back-up: Alicia, Suzy For both: Support from Maria K <i>Spanish</i> (written/phone), backed up by Maria Palacios and Denisse Cadena-Wright, <i>Vietnamese</i> support from Tan Tran (written/phone) and Mai Sullivan (written), <i>Sign language</i> support from Veronica Frambers
Web Updates <i>Pop up, ALL sites for weather, targeted for other emergencies, content on web headline news</i>	Primary: Susan A (early AM, late night), Maria L / Maria K (daytime) Back-up: Suzy, Wendy
Media	Primary: Susan A, Maria K <i>Spanish</i> Back-up: Wendy, Maria K <i>Spanish</i> , Maria L, Fabian Armendariz <i>Spanish</i>
Fielding Frontline Phone Calls	Primary: Alicia, Chelsea, Kayla, Carla*, Shawn*, Kowonia* (*situational, would come to StratComm office)
Media Monitoring / Traditional, Social, Web	Primary: Kayla, Ashley, Chelsea, Maria L, Maria K, Back-up: Jennifer, Michael, Brenda Torres <i>Spanish</i>
Documentation <i>Important to capture ALL communications disseminated and referenced, and create Microsoft Team</i>	Primary: Suzy, Jennifer BS, Chelsea Back-up: Kayla, Michael
Donation, Community Partner Support	Primary: Suzy Back-up: Kowonia



Monitor Information @ Email info@usd259.net	Primary: Alicia Back-up: Chelsea
Crisis Scene-to-Strat Comm Office Liaison	Primary: Maria L
Graphics	Primary: Kayla Back-up: Jennifer
Media Briefings	Primary: MPS Team
Team Checkup as crisis evolves	Primary: Kowonia

Situational roles / audiences:

AUDIENCE	LIAISON
Crisis Team Leader, Assistant Leader	
Leadership (Superintendent/BOE, DLT, Department Heads)	
Spokesperson	
Family/Reunification Liaison	
Employee Liaison	
VIP/Partner Liaison	
School Liaison	
Student Liaison	
Union Liaison (UTW, SEIU)	
Fire/Police PIO Liaison	
Lawmaker Liaison	
Media Base Lead	
Media Facilitator (technical)	
Communications Ops Center Lead	
Accident Liaison	
Counseling Liaison	



MESSAGING – *Write It Down!*

KEY MESSAGE 1	KEY MESSAGE 2	KEY MESSAGE 3

↓

↓

↓

SUPPORT POINT 1.1	SUPPORT POINT 2.1	SUPPORT POINT 3.1
SUPPORT POINT 1.2	SUPPORT POINT 2.2	SUPPORT POINT 3.2
SUPPORT POINT 1.3	SUPPORT POINT 2.3	SUPPORT POINT 3.3
WHEN TO SEND:		
HOW TO DISTRIBUTE:		
MESSAGE RECIPIENT(S):		

ESSENTIAL DEFINITIONS:

LOCKOUT – Lock exterior doors, limit access from outside. Activity inside continues as normal.

LOCKDOWN – Lock internal and exterior doors, no one enters or leaves building. Access to classrooms and hallways also secured. Activities *may* continue in classrooms, but no one enters/leaves internal spaces.



SAMPLE

EMAIL UPDATE FROM SAINT LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 12, 2022, 1:22 pm

Today, the Saint Louis Public Schools family has been devastated by news of an active shooter who injured six and killed one adult and one teen at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School before being shot and killed by an officer.

Students at two neighboring campuses, CVPA and Collegiate, were immediately placed on lockdown before being evacuated to a safe place to reunite with parents.

Counselors are on site and will continue to avail themselves to students, staff and families for as long as needed. Administrators and counselors are meeting with families.

NEW UPDATE: In an abundance of caution, all SLPS schools are on HARD lockdown, which means that for the remainder of the day there will be limited movement in and outside the schools. At dismissal, all scheduled buses will leave at the appointed time.

We are asking that any parents who want to come to school and pick up a student, please call the school in advance and let the office know when and who will be picking up the student. The student will be walked out to them.

Please NOTE: All after school classes and athletic activities are cancelled for this evening.

We will remain in touch with our families and community. Please rely on SLPS communications and the Police Department updates for your information.

Thank you.

George Sells
Director of Communications and Marketing
Office of Institutional Advancement
Saint Louis Public Schools
george.sells@slps.org
(c) 314.332-7035



SAMPLE

VIDEO MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT GOTHARD ABOUT THE TRAGIC EVENT AT HARDING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9phwAl7Mh0Y>

Dear Saint Paul Public Schools Community,

I am devastated to share some tragic news with you this evening. A student was seriously injured today at Harding High School and did not survive. A suspect is in custody. Due to student privacy and the police investigation, there are not many other details I can share at this time. Like all of you, I am grieving that this happened in one of our schools today.

The school went into lockdown and dismissed students early. Activities at Harding were canceled this evening and through the weekend. We will keep you informed of other cancellations or events that may be impacted by this tragic event.

We are doing everything we can to support the students, staff, families and community this evening and in the days and weeks ahead. Trauma resources are available at every school and through Ramsey County outside of school hours. Please find a few resources here:

- Resources for Students and Families: spps.org/Domain/14350
- Resources for Staff: spps.org/Domain/13967

Right now our focus is on supporting the Harding High School community and those who were directly impacted by this horrible incident, especially the family of the victim. Our young people need us more than ever. Please continue to support each other as we all grieve this tragedy and work together on healing and moving forward.

In Partnership,
Joe Gothard, Superintendent

SAMPLE

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, Richmond Public Schools' Superintendent Jason Kamras, and Interim Police Chief Rick Edwards give an update on the June 2023 deadly shooting after Huguenot High School's graduation in Richmond.



View video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ph2BVzl59s>

APPENDIX C

MESSAGES ABOUT GUNS/WEAPONS FOUND ON CAMPUS

Here are some examples of messages/statements from districts where weapons were found on campuses:

Earlier today a Booker T. Washington High School student and the student's mother alerted administrators that another student at the school may be in possession of a weapon. That student was located immediately and a weapon was recovered. The student was arrested and faces both criminal and disciplinary charges in accordance with the Atlanta Public Schools/Atlanta Board of Education zero-tolerance policy for possession of a weapon on campus. Parents were notified as soon as all of the facts of the situation were ascertained.

The safety and well-being of students and employees is, and will always be, a top priority in Atlanta Public Schools.

Weapon/Gun at school template

Voice:

Good Afternoon, parents. The safety of our students and staff is a top priority at _____. Today we had a student in possession of a gun at school. There were no threats made and no one was hurt in regards to this incident. Our Security Officers, Administration and SRO got involved immediately and took the student into police custody. We followed all district safety protocols in this matter to ensure the safety of our school community.

Parents, please discuss with your student the far-reaching and serious consequences of bringing inappropriate items to school.

I want to thank those who shared the information. We take these matters seriously and our students and parents know about See Something, Say Something in order to maintain a safe school environment.

Thank you for your continued support of _____.

Email:

Good Afternoon, parents.

The safety of our students and staff is a top priority at _____. Today we had a student in possession of a gun at school. There were no threats made and no one was hurt in regards to this incident. Our Security Officers, Administration and SRO got involved immediately and took the student into police custody. We followed all district safety protocols in this matter to ensure the safety of our school community.

Important Update from Los Angeles Unified on Van Nuys High School Incident

.....

The Van Nuys High School campus will remain on lockdown until law enforcement gives the "all-clear" to re-open the campus. The safety of our students and staff remains our top priority. There is no current threat to our campus and all student and staff remain safe.

We are informing you of a stabbing incident that involved multiple students which took place on our campus. Los Angeles School Police Department and LAPD are on scene investigating. Students are safe, and LASPD will stay on scene and continue to provide safety and support to students and employees. Parents of students involved have been notified.

1/2



Important Update from Los Angeles Unified on Van Nuys High School Incident

.....

All appropriate procedures were implemented according to District policy. In addition, our staff is well trained and regularly reviews all emergency procedures. We will continue to keep you informed throughout this process.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and patience.



2/2

APPENDIX D: CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

Cott Media Group- Dr. Roseann Canfora trains and supports K-12 higher education executives and communications teams in crisis mitigation, support, and recovery. Her expertise in crisis and media management proved invaluable to Broward County Schools in the weeks following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Author of the Crisis Communications & Active Shooting Incident Guidebook distributed to CGCS member school districts, Dr. Canfora provides valuable training for school district leaders and Public Relations Executives to effectively manage critical incidents and crises in their schools. Formerly Chief Communications Officer in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Dr. Canfora also provides training and executive coaching for entry-level PRE's.

Contact info: rcanfora@kent.edu

The Council for School Safety Leadership provides crisis communications support in the immediacy and aftermath and help guides districts on communication as part of the recovery process. John McDonald, the organization's chief operating officer, is recognized internationally as the architect of the post-Columbine tragedy safety, security, and emergency management plan.

Contact info: John McDonald, mcdonald@mosba.org

DGD Communications- Daisy Gonzalez-Diego, President, DGD Communications, was the Chief Communications and Community Engagement Officer for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the nation's third-largest school district. She oversaw all communications, public relations, marketing, and outreach for various priorities. She now leads DGD Communications, utilizing her 30 years of experience navigating the public and private sectors to assist organizations with their communication needs.

Contact info: dgdcommunications.com, 305-607-1432

Enlighted Consulting- Eileen Houston-Stewart has been a passionate advocate for public education for 27 years and has worked as a communications/community engagement chief in urban school districts in four states. Her expertise includes crisis management, public and media relations, project and events management, video script writing and voiceover narration, and executive coaching for individuals transitioning into school public relations.

Contact info: <https://enlightenedconsulting.net/>, eileen@enlightenedconsulting.net, 816-379-0385

The Grayson Agency- Founder Justin Grayson is an award-winning public relations and communications expert who has established a national reputation for his crisis management skills, marketing prowess, and ability to shape an organization's public perception. Justin has spent over a decade as a leader in the field of public school communications, successfully navigating communications challenges in some of California's largest and most diverse school districts, including Long Beach, Fresno, and Riverside Unified.

<https://www.thegraysonagency.net/contact-us>

Barbara Griffith Communications- With a career spanning several decades, Barbara Griffith brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the field of communications. Barbara served as Senior Communications Officer for the Fort Worth ISD for 17 years, where she shaped the district's public image and communication strategies. Barbara's education consulting services include crisis communications, developing strategies to boost and sustain enrollment, facilitate smooth superintendent transitions, and lead successful bond election information campaigns.

Contact info: Griffith.barbara@att.net, 817-602-5011

Horan Communications- Chris Horan is a former Chief Communications Officer for the Boston Public Schools. Since 2010, he has worked with school districts across the country as Managing Partner of Horan Communications. Chris provides coaching, training, and consulting services to School Boards, Superintendents, Communications Directors, and Administrative Teams in K-12 strategic communication. Expertise includes crisis communication, messaging, marketing, writing and editing, media relations, social media strategy, and communications assessment.

Contact: chris@horancommunications.com, 617-852-1340, Twitter [@chrishorannomm](https://twitter.com/chrishorannomm)

APPENDIX E

ACTIVE SHOOTER RESOURCES

Active Shooter Preparedness. Department of Homeland Security.

<https://www.schoolsafety.gov/resource/active-shooter-preparedness>

Active Shooter Response: An Educator's Guide. Office of the Ohio Attorney General.

<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/State-and-Local-Government/Schools/Active-Shooter-Response-An-Educator-s-Guide>

Developing Emergency Operations Plans: A Guide for Businesses (2018). Federal Bureau of Investigation, Law Enforcement Bulletin.

<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-guide-for-businesses-march-2018.pdf/view>

Fast Facts, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed August 12, 2021:

<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=54>

Federal resources to help youth cope after a mass shooting. Youth.gov.

<https://youth.gov/feature-article/federal-resources-helping-youth-cope-after-school-shooting>

Helping Students After a School Shooting. American School Counselor Association.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/when-disaster-strikes-inside-disaster-psychology/201802/school-shootings-how-respond>

Resources in Response to the High School Shooting. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

[https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/Docs/homepage/2018/Resources in Response to High School Shooting February 2018.pdf](https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/Docs/homepage/2018/Resources_in_Response_to_High_School_Shooting_February_2018.pdf)

School Shootings: How to respond (2018). Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/when-disaster-strikes-inside-disaster-psychology/201802/school-shootings-how-respond>

School Shooting Prevention, Response, Mitigation and Recovery Resources. Campus Safety Magazine, March 23, 2023.

<https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/news/school-shooting-prevention-response-mitigation-recovery-resources/>

Kowalski, P. (2022) School Shootings: What we know about them and what we can do to prevent them. The Brookings Institute.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/01/26/school-shootings-what-we-know-about-them-and-what-we-can-do-to-prevent-them/>

APPENDIX F

In recent years, school districts across the country have experienced an increase in cyberattacks. According to the White House, in the 2022-23 academic year alone, at least eight K-12 school districts throughout the country were impacted by cyberattacks.

Two of those districts were members of the Council of the Great City Schools: Los Angeles Unified School District and Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools.

In September 2022, the Los Angeles school district experienced a ransomware attack that disrupted the nation's second largest school system's access to email and key systems and applications they needed to operate schools. And on January 9, 2023, a ransomware attack on Des Moines Public Schools led the district to cancel classes.

When a school system experiences a ransomware attack it is vital for the district to effectively communicate with students, families, and employees during that time.

Here are the announcements, press releases, and notices communications departments in the Los Angeles and Des Moines



Cyberattack Update for Students, Families and Employees

.....

All of us are understandably troubled by the cyberattack we experienced in early September. The attack has been a complication that we are navigating together, and I want to provide an update of where we currently stand.

We want to assist concerned families and have opened a hotline that is available Monday-Friday 6:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and this weekend 6:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with expanded hours coming soon. Please contact 855-926-1129 for questions related to the cyberattack.

We will continue updating our community as more information is available. Please be assured that we have taken the necessary steps to protect the data of our families and staff, and we will continue working to safeguard sensitive information.

Thank you for your continued understanding and support. Students, families and employees, please review the email sent by the District today for more information.

MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Los Angeles Unified Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho will be available to answer questions on Tuesday, September 6 at 11:00 a.m. at Edward R. Roybal Learning Center – 1200 Colton St, Los Angeles, CA 90026. RSVP by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, September 6 to LASchoolsCommunications@gmail.com.

News Release

CONTACT: Shannon Haber
communications@lausd.net

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 5, 2022

Los Angeles Unified Targeted by Ransomware Attack

Los Angeles, CA (September 5, 2022) – Los Angeles Unified detected unusual activity in its Information Technology systems over the weekend, which after initial review, can be confirmed as an external cyber attack on our Information Technology assets. Since the identification of the incident, which is likely criminal in nature, we continue to assess the situation with law enforcement agencies. While the investigation continues, Los Angeles Unified has swiftly implemented a response protocol to mitigate Districtwide disruptions, including access to email, computer systems and applications. This communication is being published after extensive, required vetting and approval by a number of entities and agencies.

Despite this significant disruption to our system's infrastructure, schools will open on Tuesday, September 6 as scheduled. We are working collaboratively with our partners to address any and all impacted services. While we do not expect major technical issues that will prevent Los Angeles Unified from providing instruction and transportation, food or Beyond the Bell services, business operations may be delayed or modified. Based on a preliminary analysis of critical business systems, employee healthcare and payroll are not impacted, nor has the cyber incident impacted safety and emergency mechanisms in place at schools.

Los Angeles Unified is committed to delivering high-quality instructional programming, and we are benefiting from an immediate and comprehensive response from the federal government. After the District contacted officials over the holiday weekend, the White House brought together the Department of Education, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to provide rapid, incident response support to Los Angeles Unified, building on the immediate support by local law enforcement agencies. At the District's request, agencies marshaled significant resources to assess, protect and advise Los Angeles Unified's response, as well as future planned mitigation protocols.

Furthermore, Los Angeles Unified is immediately establishing a plan of action, informed by top public and private sector technology and cyber security professionals, to determine additional protections for the District, and to provide an independent opinion on system-wide protective measures. We will continue to benefit from the declared assistance of federal and state law enforcement entities to assist with investigative procedures and technical deployment and solutions. Presently, federal investigative and technical experts are working on-site, collaboratively, with the Information Technology Division.

Los Angeles Unified has initiated immediate adjustments to ensure this District is able to deliver what our Board, community, teachers, students and parents have come to expect, an excellent educational experience for all. In response, the following actions have been taken, will be taken immediately or will be implemented as soon as feasible.

Press Conference at Edward R. Roybal Learning Center: Cyber Threat September 6, 2022

<https://lausd.wistia.com/medias/dpcm61yr7r>



[Press Conference
at Edward R.
Roybal Learning
Center: Cyber
Threat
September 6,
2022](https://lausd.wistia.com/medias/dpcm61yr7r)

lausd.wistia.com

Press Conference Cyber Attack Follow-up Oct. 3, 2022

<https://lausd.wistia.com/medias/0jkcbjx4uv>



[Press
Conference
Cyber Attack
Follow-up Oct.
3, 2022](https://lausd.wistia.com/medias/0jkcbjx4uv)

lausd.wistia.com

UPDATES: DMPS Network Outages and Interruptions

11:00 AM – Monday, January 9, 2023

Des Moines Public Schools preemptively took the school district's internet and network services offline this morning in response to unusual activity on the network. At this time, the matter is being investigated by our IT staff and consultants.

Access to the internet, WiFi, and various networked systems, at school buildings and district offices, will be either offline or intermittent throughout the day. Telephone service is working.

We apologize for any inconvenience. An update will be provided later today.

NOTE to DMPS families and staff: To receive instant updates on your mobile device, download [Snap! Connect](#) and enable notifications.

4:30 PM – Monday, January 9, 2023

Classes are canceled at Des Moines Public Schools for Tuesday, January 10. Offices will be open although staff may be working remotely, and services will be limited. Athletics and activities are currently scheduled to take place.

Earlier this morning, DMPS was alerted to a cyber security incident on its technology network. As a preemptive measure the school district's internet and network services were taken offline as the matter is currently being investigated and assessed.

Because many technology tools that support both classroom learning as well as the management and operation of the school district are not available at this time, the prudent decision is to close the district for the day.

We apologize for any inconvenience this situation has caused. Updates will be posted as more information becomes available.

6:00 PM – Monday, January 9, 2023

Classes are canceled at Des Moines Public Schools for Tuesday, January 10. Offices will be open although staff may be working remotely, and services limited. Home athletics and activities are cancelled; away athletics and activities will continue as scheduled.



Watch video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbzj3aPdQy0&t=8s>

The district will share another progress update tomorrow morning. Please check the email address you provided the district during registration for a message from Interim Superintendent Matt Smith.

8:00 PM – Tuesday, January 10, 2023

DMPS information technology professionals have made significant progress tonight in restoring our systems. School will resume for students on Thursday, January 12. Students should expect an offline learning experience.

What has changed:

- Access to Infinite Campus student information is now available.
- Phones are operational.
- A limited number of building staff will have access to the internet, though it is not yet accessible to all classroom teachers. WiFi will not be available.
- Operations and building staff will be taking appropriate measures to keep the buildings safe and secure.

We appreciate that there are more questions to be answered (athletics, activities, etc.) We will have additional information to share tomorrow morning.

A reminder that updates can be sent directly to the [Snap! Connect](#) app on your phone.
